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THE AFGHANISTAN WAR IN HISTORICAL MEMORY AND POLITICS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Abstract. The state of research and functioning of memory policy in Ukraine regarding the war in Afghanistan is complex and depends on many factors. Since 2004, February 15 has been celebrated in Ukraine, on the official level, as the Day of Commemoration of the participants in hostilities on the territory of other states (warriors of internationalists). These events are part of the state's memory policy, which remains still inconsistent and incomplete. Public associations, veterans' unions and private initiatives play an important role in the development and functioning of the memory of the Afghan war. But this process is chaotic and inconsistent. The data on the number of Ukrainian servicemen who participated in the war in Afghanistan and the study of their fate after returning to Ukraine require clarification. Also, the majority of Ukrainians have a limited understanding of the events related to the war in Afghanistan, its causes and consequences, which indicates gaps in the state policy of memory. Such misunderstanding and lack of acceptance in society is connected with the fact that the Soviet authorities failed to formulate clearly the purpose and the goals of their invasion of Afghanistan. The topic of the Afghan war is also poorly represented in the public space and in the mass media. Taking into account the participation and death of a significant number of Ukrainian citizens in this war, a clear state policy of commemorating the Afghan war should be formed with an emphasis on its causes and with the aim of commemorating those who died in it. In the course of the research, we used such methods as the principle of historicism and objectivity, which are important for the characterization of historical events related to historical memory and the state policy of memory. The historical-genetic method makes it possible to find out the path of development of the memory of the war in Afghanistan and its evolution. The
historical-systemic method provides consideration of socio-political processes in their interrelationship and cause-and-effect dependence. As a result of the research, we found out that the commemoration of fallen soldiers in the public and memorial space has its own peculiarity related to the specifics of the conflict.

**Keywords:** war in Afghanistan, memory politics, historical politics, places of memory, problems of historical memory.

**Problem formulation.** The war in Afghanistan lasted from 1979 to 1989 and became one of the tragic pages of Ukrainian history. Thousands of Ukrainians soldiers and officers took part in this war, which forever changed their own lives and lives of their families. The war in Afghanistan also had a lasting impact on Ukrainian state and society. The motivation for the war was not clearly defined and formed, the USSR authorities covered themselves with general theses, which were mainly based on the desire to maintain geopolitical influence over the region. Ten years later the goal wasn’t achieved and the USSR withdrew its troops, and the status of the Afghans since that time has not been determined and has been constantly changing. Problems with historical memory, including different interpretations of the events that happened during the war, the lack of a clearly defined position is another omission in the state politics of memory. In independent Ukraine, the memory of the war in Afghanistan is present in formal events, most of which are tied to memorable dates. And the reasons for that war have not been clearly explained to society, there is no emphasis on the need to preserve the memory of the fallen Ukrainians, there is a need for a clear policy of memory.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Sources and scientific literature devoted to the war in Afghanistan, as a rule, highlight either the subjective attitude of the author, or show the state policy regarding this war in different periods of history. It presents various aspects of war, such as military strategy, societal context, and consequences for military personnel and civilians. In particular, in Soviet documents, we can follow the official state position regarding the conflict, diaries and interviews of direct participants, which allows us to reveal such aspects of the researched topic as the life of the soldiers, personal attitude to the war, and the Soviet soldiers’ perception of the local population.

In the course of researching this topic, we divided historiography into the following groups: historical literature, art works, memorial works of participants and archival documents. Comprehensive processing of various groups of sources and literature allows us to reveal the researched topic as objectively as possible.

**The purpose of the article:** to reveal the content and find out the existing problems in the existing memory policy regarding the Afghan war and the prospects for its improvement. In this context, the tasks of researching the foreign policy factors of this war and the interests of various states are relevant; elucidation of the
causes and consequences of unclear formulation of the tasks and goals for soldiers and society; ways of perception and commemoration in other countries. It is also important to analyze the options for commemorating the memory and arranging the memorial space, their initiators, types and specifics of the arrangement.

In the course of the research, the principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity were used to achieve the set goal and objectives. Historical-genetic, historical-comparative and diachronic-structural methods helped to reveal the essence of the issue.

**Presentation of the main material.** The history of the war in Afghanistan is a difficult topic for research, because the scientific community and society still do not have a clear and established position on this war. Modern Ukraine was not a direct participant in this conflict, but the Ukrainian SSR, as a constituent part of the USSR, was forced to send its military personnel to participate in hostilities.

Taking into account the fact that the described conflict took place relatively recently, the large part of the authors of these sources are direct participants in the events and activists of the future veteran associations. [10] A. Kostrytsia examines the war in Afghanistan as the culmination of the "cold war". In his research works, the author analyzes in detail the interests of the USA, China, and Pakistan, which supported the Afghan opposition. The war in Afghanistan acts as one of the ways for the US to weaken and exhaust the USSR in order to destroy it further. [3] In the same context, O. Kovalev studies the cooperation of the international community, particularly between the USA and Pakistan. [2] The peculiarities of conducting hostilities are disclosed in the work of S. Tarantsya. [9] A separate topic for research on the memory of the war in Afghanistan is the memorial space and its arrangement. O. Rozhdestvenska, I. Tartakovska dedicated their works to it. [7] The symbolic structure of war memorials in Afghanistan is investigated by Yu. Dobrolyubska and I. Matsyshina. [1, 4] The life of soldiers, their leisure time in the conditions of hostilities, their personal attitude to the war, and the attitude of the local population to them using the oral history method became the subject of research by V. Siropol, D. Ostrovyk and others. [8] However, today there is no comprehensive approach for the studying of the Afghan war and its representation in the historical memory and memorial space of Ukraine.

Ukraine was one of the countries that sent its military personnel to fight in Afghanistan during 1979-1989. According to calculations, about 15,000 Ukrainian military personnel participated in this war. It was a complex war that required a high level of training and high morale from the military and ended with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. The society still hasn’t established on a final opinion about the evaluation the withdrawal of the USSR troops from Afghanistan. From the party leadership’s point of view, all the military objectives were achieved. According to the estimates of international and domestic experts, these were forced actions due to the total exhaustion of the USSR economy and the growth of public discontent.
The events of the Afghan War have been repeatedly described by historians, journalists, and military personnel who were directly involved in the combat operations. Over the years, questions have arisen regarding the terminology used to describe the war. In the classical sense, a military invasion of another independent state's territory is understood as war and military actions, even if war was not officially declared. Some authors attempt to argue why the terminology, particularly the concept of war, should be changed in relation to these events. A. Kostyria, for example, uses the term "Soviet special operation in Afghanistan" in his scholarly works on the events of 1979-1989 in Afghanistan. Similar arguments are not uncommon and are partly aimed at softening and justifying the aggressive actions of the USSR in Afghanistan. However, in the context of the modern war of Russia against Ukraine, it can be assumed that the use of such terminology in the future will be perceived solely as a smokescreen by the aggressor to conceal its criminal and unjustified actions. [3]

An important aspect of studying the Afghan War is the examination of external factors of influence, the period of heightened Cold War tensions, and the interests of involved countries. The Soviet war against Afghanistan was advantageous to the United States, Pakistan, and China in order to achieve their geopolitical positions.

Undoubtedly, the United States was particularly interested in this war, as they sought new ways to secure victory in the Cold War. Provoking such conflicts became one of the means to ultimately weaken the USSR and bring it to collapse. [3] Contacts between the United States and Pakistan intensified during the period of 1979-1989. Such international connections were necessary for the United States to support opposition forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan, in turn, was interested in assistance from the United States, as it found itself between an aggressive Afghanistan and a hostile India. The main evidence of the United States' interest in cooperating with Pakistan is that after the war ended, they terminated most of their cooperative programs. [2]

A separate issue in society's perception of the war and the state's attitude towards veterans and their status was the unclear formulation of the objectives and goals of the invasion of Afghanistan. There were cases where various military units and branches were assigned atypical tasks. Such miscalculations by the authorities and military leadership led to an increase in the number of casualties. It can be assumed that these actions were not accidental but aimed at concealing political goals and military miscalculations. For example, the border troops suffered significant losses, but considering that it was the USSR that carried out offensive actions, the numbers should have been lower. The increase in casualties was related to changing combat tasks for the border troops, which involved their deployment not on the state border but on the occupied territory. [9]
However, Ukraine still lacks a comprehensive national memory policy regarding the Afghan War. After the Soviet authorities failed to explain the reasons for the war and why thousands of people sacrificed their lives for, they decided to eliminate the issue from the public discourse. Such a state policy left the veterans alone with their experiences. In 2004, following the decree of President L. Kuchma, Ukraine began to observe the Day of Remembrance for Participants of Military Actions on the Territory of Other States (Internationalist Warriors). This was one of the first significant steps towards establishing a historical policy regarding the war in Afghanistan. [6]

Despite official events such as the Day of Remembrance, the memory of the war in Afghanistan is still far from being fully represented in Ukrainian society and memorial spaces. However, positive shifts are occurring thanks to initiatives from the public, although the specificity, local character, and inconsistency of the actions of civil society can also play a negative role in constructing a comprehensive memory policy. For example, the mass and chaotic nature of the rapid construction of memorials led to the loss of their sacred meaning and role in the formation of a filled memorial space.

Also, the state of historical memory of the Afghan war in Ukraine was determined by the political and ideological changes that took place after the end of the Soviet era. The transition to democracy and the building of a nation state required a rethinking of historical events and a reassessment of some of their aspects.

It should be noted that the historical memory of the Afghan war differs in different countries of the world. For example, in Russia, the memory of this war has a complicated character, since it took place during the time of the Soviet Union, which tried to present it as a "just fight against Islamic extremism." While the countries that supported the Afghan opposition do not recognize themselves as direct participants in that conflict, that is why the events of 1979-1989 are virtually absent in their society and memorial space.

Speaking about the arrangement of the memorial space and the construction of monuments, experts outline several periods characterized by different approaches. In particular, at the beginning of the 1980s, the names of those who died in Afghanistan began to be added to the existing memorials erected in memory of those who died in the Second World War. Later, from the end of the 80s, independent memorials and monuments to the heroes of the new war were created.

One of the main distinctive features of the memorials dedicated to the war in Afghanistan is the initiative of the fighters themselves to establish the monuments. Such a phenomenon is a component of the state policy of memory, which clearly demonstrates a certain detachment of the state from the creation of a memorial space.

The first such monuments in Ukraine appeared in 1989 in Dnipro and Cherkasy region. Later, this process intensified and gained mass. I. Matsyshina notes
in the course of her research that during the presidency of L. Kuchma, the number of monuments to Afghan soldiers on the territory of Ukraine actively increased, and this should indicate the creation of a group identity with the support of the state. However, the monuments ceased to meet the modern needs of society and they gradually lost their visibility in the urban space. [4]

Three main groups of monuments dedicated to the war in Afghanistan can be distinguished in the memorial space. The first were built by the forces of the fighters themselves, as a rule, they were filled with a sense of brotherhood. The second group was closely associated with religious themes, which should justify the righteousness of the war. The third group was based on elements inherent in World War II monuments. A separate group of memorial complexes were museum-clubs, most of which were created by local participants in the war. [7]

Examining the symbolic structure of memorials dedicated to the war in Afghanistan, Y. Dobrolyubska emphasizes the direct influence of public perception of that war on the creation of memorials. Due to the insufficient coverage of the Afghan war in society, it is a controversial topic and a general agreement was never reached. The vision of the war as a losing one and the lack of a clear motivation and reasons for which the fighters died, pushes society to look for original ways to honor the memory of the dead. The emphasis in the memorialization of this war is on the servicemen themselves, the spirit of brotherhood, and not on the fact of the war. An important detail that was reflected in the memorials, namely the fact of distancing society and the state from this war. The memorials do not highlight society's involvement in that war, while the state distanced itself as much as possible from that war and veterans, which led to the absence of state and national symbols on the memorials. [1]

In the course of Afghan war researching, we have the invaluable advantage of being able to interview the directly involved fighters. Oral history methods will allow us to reveal aspects of the war that are often overlooked by major historical studies, such as everyday life, leisure, personal attitudes to war, etc. However, the application of this method requires a critical attitude to these materials, since most of them were recorded already in the post-war period and could be partially deformed.

Such methods are often used not only by professional historians, but also by a large number of local historians, students and simply interested people. The fighters mostly described their daily life, combat schedule, conduct of specific combat operations. Evidences of daily life and routine usually depend on the soldier's place of service, nature of service, etc. [8] It should be noted separately that the interviews reveal the attitude of the local Afghan population towards Soviet soldiers. Despite the fact that such testimony will highlight the subjective position of a Soviet soldier who gives this information based on his worldview. Soviet
soldiers were mostly perceived as invaders who needed to be resisted in order to preserve their honor. An important role in the formation of such an attitude is attributed to the religious leaders of communities, who have considerable power over the local population. [5]

Conclusions. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the historical memory of the war in Afghanistan remains an important topic for Ukraine and the world as a whole, which is primarily related to the political nature of this conflict. Despite the fact that more than 30 years have passed since the end of the war, the memory of it in society and the state continues to be formed and has not yet received a clear and unified design. Until today, the problems that don’t allow to achieve a positive result in the formation of Afghan war memory are insufficient attention of the government to it, insignificant funding, lack of coordination between government and public organizations, lack of coverage of the topic in mass media and scientific research.

We can also confirm that interest in studying the events of the war in Afghanistan is maintained, new, previously not covered aspects of it are being investigated. The war in Afghanistan became one of the culminating elements of the Cold War. The US was directly interested in a weakened USSR due to its long and exhausting involvement in the conflict with Afghanistan. In support of this thesis, there are facts of increased cooperation between the US and Pakistan during the conflict.

Trying to justify their invasion on the territories of another state, the party leadership actively used slogans that should show the geopolitical interest of the USSR in this war. In particular, the destruction of an enemy regime in a neighboring country, support of a friendly regime that was oppressed (although objectively it simply left the USSR for being removed). Clear and understandable goals and tasks for the soldiers and the population were never formed, and therefore it is extremely difficult to evaluate the results of the ten-year war.

Modern Russia's preservation of aggressive propaganda and political vectors has led to the defense of the thesis of constant struggle with the external enemy and support of the missionary mission of the USSR and Russia. For the most part, the memory of this war is preserved in the countries of the post-Soviet space, because the rest of the countries, which, although were interested in the conflict, didn’t directly participate.

There is a certain inconsistency in the preservation and functioning of the memory of the Afghan war in Ukraine today. Formally, the state assumed part of the responsibilities for commemorating the heroes, including the introduction of an official day of remembrance. At the same time, a single state concept that would contribute to the development of memory policy in this direction was never formed. Public organizations and private initiatives are usually supported by state and local authorities, which has both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, this
allows for the constant memory maintenance in society, on the other hand, it leads to chaotic and inconsistent actions. Due to the still unclear nature of that war, the lack of clear and justified goals, society shifted the emphasis to honoring the memory of the dead, and not to the fact of victory in the war.

The war in Afghanistan, which lasted from 1979 to 1989 of the previous century and which thousands of people survived, demanding their responsible and careful representation.

References: